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# OUR SUPERVISED MORALS

BY LOUISE COLLIER WILLCOX

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WHO is to supervise the morals of a people? The time is past when parents supervised the morals of their children, and the government in a large and liberal spirit took charge of such mature persons as obstructed the public welfare. With the growth of the world and the multiplication of complexities and the swift spread of evil communications this matter of supervising morals has passed into the control of censors, librarians, critics, and that huge and alarming leviathanic specter, Public Opinion.

Now morals, like any other defined science, should have a creed and a body of doctrine. But where to-day should serious students, librarians who must accept and exclude books for general circulation, censors who are to judge the value and virtue of plays, legislators who must choose subjects fit for public discussion—where are all these to go to school and prepare themselves for their great public function? Where are our schools of morals and ethics to set beside our law and divinity schools—and our new schools of journalism? This, the most serious subject in the world—how so to live as to do no harm to ourselves or to others—is left to the mere erratic tendencies of private, unaided, and unschooled opinion. Perhaps the churches are considered the schools of morals, and if this is admitted the statistics of the church attendance of all our legislators, librarians, purveyors of amusement, art censors, etc., should be taken. But no; the churches are schools of theological dogma, a matter totally unrelated to morals and only here and there, sporadically, does one find clergymen with definite ethical doctrines who feel called upon to teach them. The topic uppermost just now in the ministerial mind, as who may prove who listens to sermons from Maine to Virginia and from Massachusetts to Colorado, is the supremacy and need

of the Church. That the Church is not a useless or a decadent institution is vociferously proclaimed from all the pulpits. Well, is it a school of morals? Is it intent upon a nice distinction between right and wrong? Does it teach and control the librarians who are discarding books, the legislators who are deciding what occupations are suited to Sunday and which to Monday? Can it settle the matter of prohibition and temperance and prostitution? Somehow our morals are inadequately handled. Popular morality consists largely in a terror at innovation, at a sense of outrage at anything new. Results to the unconcerned outsider are interesting and provocative of thought. Revolting and inane musical comedies flourish unhindered. Cabaret shows—the outer and visible sign of the inward and material disgrace—become popular and established customs. Veiller's instructive play "The Fight" must be taken from the stage or cut to suit the moral sense of the police, while Brioux's morality plays fight for a hearing! Who can forget the winter when in Philadelphia Strauss's opera "Salome" was suppressed, while "The Soul-Kiss," an unclean and revolting exhibition, ran for three months? The drama which with serious art made evil loathsome and contrasted it with a saint who triumphed, was condemned. But the play which made indecency appear a gay jest, flourished. Where were the schools of morals? It would seem that we are not afraid of anything light and frivolous, however immoral, if it appeal to the under-educated and the irresponsible, but we are seriously opposed to any grave consideration of morality. It is as if our chief slogan were to cry: What we do not mention does not exist. But alas! the shut eye is no sign of death, and sly jest and insinuating innuendo are but a thin covering for flaunted evil.

Meanwhile the librarians are barring from circulation Hall Caine's new book—not in the least on the very plausible grounds that he lacks a fine sense of reality, and that hysterical melodrama is a dangerous explosive, but because he discusses too freely and openly the questions of marriage and divorce.

Where are we to turn for the cures of this disease we call immorality? Where are we to learn its causes, its needs, its cures?

We do not suppress disease by shutting our eyes to it. When it is flagrantly present we contrast it at once with

health, we try remedies, we publish our conclusions, we openly discuss our efficiency. One lesson in morality that requires spreading is that serious and intentional publicity is necessary and a precaution, whereas any easy and jesting acceptance of evil is destructive. Another is that serious thinking is not necessarily morbid or decadent, and new ideas, wherever they are directed toward the protection of life and liberty without infringement upon the rights of others, are valuable assets and not insults. If a joyous acceptance of life as it appears on the surface is the natural primitive instinct, thought, discrimination, judgment, are growth, not decay. The throw-back from maturity of mind is senility, not decadence. Surely that is not what we desire when we discard contemplation.

Another question about which there is much discussion is how is the healer, the doctor of ethics, to be trained. What is it he is to be taught in order to heal his world? Writes one critic of modern institutions: "The healer in any line must study evil; he must first know what he is to heal." According to this the chief study of the healer is the immorality he is to conquer. He is to study the exact opposite of what he is to practise. For what he is to practise and make manifest among men is goodness. If one turn back down the ages to see how this has worked in history it is difficult to come to a conclusion. There was Buddha, for example, admittedly a very great healer of sin and sinners. He retired from the world, renouncing parents, wife, and all social ties, feeling that only in the quiet contemplation of virtue could he really serve his world. "A man is not wise by much speaking," he reported; "a man is wise who is forgiving, kindly, and fearless." "To study new ideals, to purify the mind by contemplation of all things fair and just," this was what he finally had to teach.

"As the wind throws down a shaky tree, so death and illusion overthrow him who gives his life to vanity, uncontrolled, intemperate, slothful, and effeminate. But who turns his eyes from vanity, controlled and temperate, faithfully and strenuously seeking the good, Death cannot overthrow any more than the wind can overthrow a rocky crag."

And again he says:

"If thou wouldst be a warrior, put on armor. The stripping oneself of worldly standards is the sword of the combat; endurance is the helmet; humility is the breastplate."

Lao-Tze, who wrote the Ta-Teh-King, a path upon which many climbed virtuewards, has a cryptic saying on this matter of the knowledge of evil: "To know—yet be as though not knowing—this is good." "Those whose faith (in the good) is insufficient shall not find it."

This attitude would seem more Christlike than the first. That Christ recognized evil is undeniable, though He seems never to have dwelt upon it or studied it or healed by reason of His knowledge of it. If one take His most authentic words, one finds evil mentioned just once in His prayer, and the Sermon on the Mount is a mere repetition of beatitudes. Of His unconquerable belief in one's power of discovering good everywhere and the necessity of looking for it, we have the Oxyrhynchite Logia: "Raise the stone and there thou shalt find me, cleave the wood and there am I." His utterances upon evil are few and scattered and casual; such brief comment as, "Go and sin no more."

Socrates' whole time was given to the search after the true nature of good, and he at least reached the conviction that it did not consist in any traffic between gods and men.

St. Francis was a most wonderful healer, and if thieves and lepers and wild animals bowed to his love and friendliness it was because his whole vision was a vision of good. He wasted no thought upon the evil he was to cope with; he merely replaced it by beauty. He quite literally overcame evil with good.

Are not our physicians at last realizing that their art is not a study of disease so much as a study of health and how to preserve it? A great reaction is taking place all through the profession; a reaction that tends to deal with hygiene and the laws of health rather than the course of diseases. If Christian Science carries this doctrine to a hysterical limit, at least there is a fundamental truth at the base. We know what health is by having it, not by having a disease to cure. And we shall know goodness by seeing it, by hearing it extolled, by practising it; and the great teachers and healers will be so drenched in goodness that the knowledge of evil shall be the smallest part of their equipment. Some wise man has said: "Let no picture of evil stand before men without its contrasting good, that their minds may dwell chiefly on the goal to be attained."

LOUISE COLLIER WILLCOX.